

May 4, 2016

Dear Chairman Nofs, Vice Chairman Proos and members of the Senate Energy and Technology Committee:

I am writing to urge you to vote against the current version of the SB 428 that attempts to kill renewable energy advancement in the state. As your constituent, former county commissioner, and retired founding director of MSU's Office of Campus Sustainability I have a bigger and deeper view of these issues than your average constituent. More recently, my wife and I have invested in a photovoltaic system to produce the electricity we consume. As I understand it, our contract with Consumers Energy is not affected by this legislation, so I am not specifically arguing from my personal benefit.

I studied climatology as an undergraduate more than 40 years ago graduating with a degree in Geography. I almost went to the University of Wisconsin to do graduate work in climatology before changing routes. Climate change is not a hoax, and hopefully none of you believe it to be. The evidence continues to mount that humans are the key cause of that change and that the outcomes of our collective refusal to reduce our impacts via fossil fuel consumption and deforestation are increasingly present and threaten only to be more severe and less predictable.

I believe our responsibility to current and future generations is to minimize that impact by doing the best we can to reduce consumption, and replace fossil fuels with less harmful energy producing technologies. The bill that is being considered today basically takes a sledge hammer to the growing renewable industry in the state. It is clear that the giant utilities are driving this. Neither DTE nor Consumers Energy has been anything but laggards in responding to climate threats, let alone, prudent stewards of our communities. We do not need voluntary guidelines or erasure of net metering. We need a more aggressive renewable energy standard – at least 30 percent by 2030 and 100% by 2050. And we need a strong net metering law, that encourages individuals, organizations, and businesses to invest and apply renewable energy generation. The role of government is to protect the public good. And in this case your public is the entire human family. This bill supports narrow private-for-profit interests, not the public good.

When we were soliciting bids for our solar system we interviewed four Michigan firms. Each of them was willing to install a system that could work for us, but each of them felt that the coming end to the renewable energy standard could slow the demand for solar, wind and other renewable technologies. This was even before the proposal before you came to light that puts an end to a renewable energy standard and a torch to net metering.

Under the proposal as written, I might invest \$15,000--\$25,000 to produce renewable energy on my house or in my yard. I could sell the power to the utility at wholesale price and buy it back at retail. Tell me how many investors would see this as anything other than a rip-off. Those of us who are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and are fortunate to be able to make that investment will do it. But with this legislation you will demolish the renewable industry in this state and with it thousands of jobs, like those who came out to quote our bid.

Hockey legend Wayne Gretsky is said to have responded to a question about how he was so effective as a goal scorer, by noting that he didn't skate towards the puck, he "skated to where the puck was gonna be." The large utilities, and the current state legislature instead of moving toward where the future energy needs and opportunities are likely to be, are risking our future with this myopic legislation. If you were truly committed to the public good the legislation would build large incentives to reduce energy consumption through conservation and/or efficiencies. A kilowatt not consumed is the most reliable and cheapest way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

And we need to move much more quickly to replace our use of fossil fuels than this legislation is addressing. Incentives to producers and consumers of renewable energy, akin to the 30% federal tax credit that was just extended last year, make a lot of sense. Why not state level incentives? If we want renewable energy businesses to create good jobs that manufacture, install, and service these new energy technologies, we need to show them we are in it for the long haul. This bill is a disappointment on too many levels. Please reject it and give our children and grandchildren an energy future that is secure, sustainable and one to be proud of.

Sincerely,

Terry Link  
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